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Seven-day Meditation Retreat
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File 5a – Wednesday morning guided meditation

So take a few deep breaths into the belly. Really feel your body. We're over half-way now but keep it stable, keep it consistent, keep it simple. It doesn't need to be complicated. Your mind will try to complicate things, "There must be an easy way. There must be a better way." But this practice hasn't really changed in thousands of years. And it works, it really does. It's hard – of course it's hard at times – but it's very beautiful in its simplicity. It's basic Zen practice. And if you apply this practice you will get results. Maybe not the results you were hoping for or thought you might get. They might be completely different because you won't get what you expect.

Enlightenment isn't what you think it is. It's totally different to anything you've ever experienced before because it's not an experience. It's a state but it's not a fixed state. It's now, which is always changing, never the same. Nothing is ever repeated.

And the practice is the same wherever you are, however long you've been doing this or whether you just started, it's the same. Don't try and change and manipulate it to how you think it should be, how it suits you, how you *think* it suits you.

When I was young I always wanted to be different. I didn't want to be part of the crowd. I always wanted to be special, and most of us do in one way or another. But the greatest relief of my life was when I stopped feeling like I had to, or wanted to do that, when I was just perfectly content to disappear into the crowd, to not want to be special. It's the most amazing feeling to just give up, give up trying to be anything. And then you're just your natural, authentic nature. You stop trying to separate yourself in some way or another.

So feel the sensation of your eyelids on your eyes, however it feels. Feel the breath going through your nostrils, your mouth, your lips. Feel your jaw, your chin. Feel your shoulders. And keep breathing deeply into the belly, into your body, using your breath as an anchor, not an avoidance, not a focus, but as an anchor in your body.

Go to your left shoulder and go down your arm to your left elbow and feel your elbow – feel inside your elbow. Then go down your left hand and feel your hand, and feel your thumb and each finger. And keep breathing into the belly. Then go up to your right shoulder and feel your shoulder, and go down your arm to your right elbow, and down to your right hand and feel your hand, however it feels. Move your fingers if you have trouble feeling it. Feel both arms and both hands.

Then take your attention to your chest as you breathe in and out through the nose, feel the gentle movement of your chest with the breath. Then go down to the abdomen; really breathe into the abdomen. Feel your abdomen rising and falling as your body breathes. And you don't need to direct your body to breathe, you don't need to control anything. Feel your thighs, your knees, your feet.

Feel your spine from the top of the spine down your back to the bottom of the spine. And if you ever need to, just gently straighten the spine if you notice you're slightly bent. Then again feel your whole body.

So each time you realise you've been taken away by thinking, seduced by thoughts – it doesn't matter what they are, don't divide them into good and bad, positive or negative – thinking is thinking. So can you listen to sounds without making a comment about them. Hear the bird, simply hear it without even saying, "Isn't that beautiful?" Don't divide sounds into positive and negative, "I want to hear this but I don't want to hear that." Try and listen to them equally, hear them equally. So for this sit practice listening to sounds, watching your reaction to them, your comment. And come back to your body.